

Bill Would Protect the Great Lakes from the Economic and Environmental Harm of Future Invasive Species

Rochester, NY – Congresswoman Louise Slaughter (NY-28), Co-Chair of the Great Lakes Task Force, last night introduced legislation that would protect the United States and ecosystems like the Great Lakes from the economic and environmental threats of invasive species.

The Invasive Fish and Wildlife Prevention Act of 2012, H.R.5864, would significantly strengthen the ability of federal regulators to make rapid, science-based decisions on whether non-native fish or wildlife species pose a risk to ecosystems within the United States and cause economic damage or threaten public health. The legislation seeks to prevent the next damaging invasive species, like the Asian carp, from entering the U.S using a proactive, rather than reactive approach

Slaughter has been a long-time champion of the Great Lakes. The Lakes are the largest source of freshwater on earth and need to be protected for future generations, not only because they support our local ecosystem, but also because they are a leading economic driver for communities across Upstate New York.

"We don't have to look too far upstream to see the threats posed by invasive species," said Slaughter who has long stood up for the health of the Great Lakes. "In Western New York we rely on the Great Lakes for fishing, shipping and recreation the introduction of an invasive species like the Asian carp would be devastating to the lakes' ecosystem and regional economy. If Congress had acted sooner to reform outdated rules and regulations, we would not be spending tens of millions of dollars a year to keep the Carp out of the Great Lakes. The Invasive Fish and Wildlife Prevention Act would prevent the import of harmful, non-native fish, wildlife, and wildlife diseases. It is an important step forward to better protect this country from the damage that comes from invasive species."

The Invasive Fish and Wildlife Prevention Act of 2012

The Invasive Fish and Wildlife Prevention Act of 2012 would strengthen the U.S. Fish and

Wildlife Service's (FWS) ability to designate animals as "injurious," meaning these animals could not be imported or shipped between states without a permit. It would also empower the FWS to become proactive rather than reactive in its listing and restriction process, and stop harmful invasive fish and wildlife from ever arriving at our shores.

Invasive species are a persistent and costly thorn in the side of the American taxpayer. In Fiscal Years 2010 and 2011, the federal budget allocated approximately \$120 million to control the Asian carp. Meanwhile the U.S. is spending tens of millions more dollars to control other invaders, such as wetland-destroying nutria and two python species established in south Florida.

Yet, federal regulators are frequently slow to respond to emerging threats. Invasive species are currently regulated by the Lacey Act, a 112-year-old law that gives the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) only limited power to declare non-native animals as "injurious" and prohibit their importation and interstate sales. In fact, it takes the FWS an average of four years to officially list a species as injurious and take appropriate action. Experts and interested parties repeatedly describe this regulatory approach as reactive and ineffective.

Alternatively, the Invasive Fish and Wildlife Prevention Act would give the FWS streamlined authority to prevent invasions using modern scientific approaches. The bill also creates a category of "Injurious II" species, which are not suited as private pets or aquarium species, but can be held safely by qualified zoos, aquaria, research facilities and other institutions without any need for a Federal permit. This exemption is broader than current law, which requires a Federal permit for transactions in all listed species, a requirement that is becoming unworkable as more animals are listed.

The legislation is supported by a coalition of 28 environmental, conservation, fishing, boating, and religious organizations from across the country including Buffalo Niagara Riverkeeper, Buffalo Audubon Society, Alliance for the Great Lakes and Great Lakes United. Today the group wrote a letter of support on the Invasive Fish and Wildlife Prevention Act saying,

"We share a common priority of preventing and controlling aquatic invasive species... The Asian carp invasion is the prime example of how federal reforms to screen species for risk before importation could save the nation's natural resources, and hundreds of millions of dollars in control costs. Improvements in regulating the live wild animal trade will help protect the Great Lakes as well as the rest of the nation from purposefully imported invasive species."

[A letter of support from the coalition of 28 groups is available here.](#)

Sean Mahar, Director of Government Relations for Audubon New York, the state program of the National Audubon Society said, "For several years, Congress has considered legislation that would modernize our antiquated and broken regulatory system, but unfortunately these bills have repeatedly stalled, leaving birds, other wildlife, and people at risk. By acting now, Congress can save taxpayers millions of dollars a year in damages and control costs, and we applaud Congresswoman Slaughter for leading the charge to protect water, land, and air from the onslaught of invasive species."

Slaughter Protecting the Great Lakes from the Threat of Asian Carp

Slaughter has a long history standing up for the Great Lakes and protecting our local ecosystem, as well as preventing economic havoc that would ensue if Asian carp were to enter the Great Lakes.

Slaughter has repeatedly noted that once an invasive species such as Asian carp is allowed to take hold in any part of the Great Lakes system, it is only a matter of time until the species spreads to the rest of the lakes.

In April, [Slaughter, along with Republican Representative Dave Camp \(MI-4\), introduced the Stop Invasive Species Act, H.R. 4406](#). The bipartisan legislation requires the speedy creation of an action plan to block Asian carp from entering the Great Lakes through a number of rivers and tributaries across the Great Lakes region.

In January, [Slaughter called on the Army Corps of Engineers to move quickly on a strategy to combat the threat of Asian carp](#) armed with new information from a study analyzing various engineering options to separate the Great Lakes and Mississippi River basins in the Chicago Area Waterway System to prevent inter-basin movement of harmful aquatic invasive species, including Asian carp.

In a [November letter to House Appropriations Committee leaders](#) , Slaughter said, along with other Great Lakes advocates,

"The lakes provide invaluable recreational opportunities and support shipping, fishing, boating and tourism industries that generate 1.5 million jobs and \$62 billion in wages. Restoring the Great Lakes advances our regional strategy to create jobs, stimulate economic development and invest in freshwater resources and waterfront communities."

Slaughter has been the Co-Chair of the Great Lakes Task Force since 2005. The Task Force is a bipartisan organization that cooperates to enhance the economic and environmental health of the Great Lakes. Founded in the mid-1980s, Task Force members work to advocate for policies and programs that enhance our unique natural resource—the Great Lakes.

[For more on Slaughter's work to protect the Great Lakes, click here.](#)